

A Political Vendetta

By
WELDON J. COBB

CHAPTER XIV.

The foam of passion and frenzy bathed Gideon Hope's lips. Like a madman he tore at the bars, raving out incoherent rage and defeat.

His prey had escaped him—and, too, booted and spurred for the flight.

Well he knew that before he could reach the roof and descend to earth, Kane would be out of the building, speeding through the labyrinthine of the plant to some point of obscurity.

Fear would lend him wings, money would purchase him the means of evading pursuit. Oh! this man must be overtaken—checked, here—now!

Hope regained terra firma, running a race of reckless risks he never realized. He was out of breath, his clothing torn, his frame wrenched and bruised. He retreated quickly, then in a flash he acted.

Lightning quick he made for a tower—a few hundred yards across the molding yard. An engine house, elongated from its base, and steam was hissing thence, but not slowly.

In through the open doorway Hope dashed. The man in charge was looting on a bench, smoking. Hope ran up to him, seized him, brought him to his feet with a jerk and four mystic words—the secret passwords of the inner circle of that great industrial federation, "the Amalgamated."

The man started at him in wonder.

"Hello," he stammered.

"You understand?" retorted Hope in pistol-shot sharpness.

"What's up—a strike?"

"No, an order, positive—for the good of the society."

"All right."

"See, I have the power to command."

Hope exhibited a disc. The man bowed in profound obeisance, as he traced its symbolic inscriptions.

"Turn on the arc lights—quick!" directed Hope—"over the whole plant, clear down the main road."

"That's queer!"

"Do it!"

"You bet—it's a mystery, but the Amalgamated incrimination, ere he handed him over to justice."

"It does."

"Then—here goes!"

He sprang to a dynamo crank. Soon the bright wheels were whirling, the sparks flying.

Magie illumination prevailed where grim blackness had reigned, somber and dense, before.

"Light!" exclaimed Gideon Hope, and ran outside, darted up the tower ladder, strained his eager sight across the landscape.

The crystalline streaks of blinding radiance cut air and sky in every direction. At last a great whirling cry parted Hope's ardent lips.

There, to the west, making for an intricate network of railway tracks beyond the works, a black speck was diving away—Kane.

What must he have thought to be suddenly blinded, overtaken by the fast and far-extending circuit of electricity! He could not hide or evade—he could only put on, making off fast as he could for shelter, obscurity, where the jungle of tracks and trains showed a mile ahead of him.

One look, one sure estimate of course, distance, pitted powers of speed and endurance, and Gideon Hope was on his trail like the bound on the track of the fugitive wolf.

On and on, nearer and nearer—now pursuer and pursued were fairly clear of the plant lights, but the feeble torch more frequent lamps of the vast switchyards still served to guide the former, and the latter was almost continually in sight.

A fierce joy thrilled Hope. The very peril of being baffled, the exhilarating zest of a new hunting ground, made this second capture the more precious and treasured.

"I have you!" shouted Hope.

A moving train of freight cars blocked the fugitive. He turned—at bay.

Kane snarled and showed his teeth. He glanced wildly about him for a rock, a conning-pin—any weapon of assault or defense.

None was at hand. His fingers hugged close to his breast the precious fortune so dearly won.

"Give it up," said Gideon Hope, his eyes glittering with triumph as he advanced—"Ha!"

His desperate foe had courted death rather than surrender. Kane dropped to his knees. A last glance of bitter hatred he flung at his unrelenting pursuer. Then he threw himself past the moving trucks of a freight car, scrambling across the roadbed.

A howl of agony rent his lips. Quick and spry, infused with terrific courage and resolve, he might have got across the other rail, only that the money package slipped from his grasp.

Hope sprang forward to seize it, for it lay flat, freed for moment, directly balancing on top of the smooth, silver-clear rail.

And then—a grinding wheel struck it, moving quicker than human groping hands.

Squarely, evenly, the flange cut it in two—one-half fell outside the rail, one-half inside.

Kane snatched up one fragment, Hope the other.

A flash, a rustle, and the schemer threw himself free of the tracks on the other side.

When the train had passed he was nowhere to be seen.

Gideon Hope stood glancing all about the brightly illuminated switch-yard.

"Slipped me, eh?" he murmured. "But only for a time! I have clipped his wings—I have robbed him of his power—half the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars!" And he waved the severed bank notes. "A part, waste paper—and without money what is he? A skulking, helpless beggar!—Percy Kane, a brief respite, if you choose, but you are beaten, mine—I shall ruin the game in the end!"

At daylight Gideon Hope was his old

cold, critical, calculating self.

Reason had succeeded to the furious reign of passion and recklessness. He felt that he held the reins of fate securely in his grasp. He had modified his plans, at the same time giving reinforcement to the power that must eventually enmesh and drag to justice the fugitive, Kane.

A score of trusty, willing aides—those same who had assisted in overthrowing the political ring of the state—were now secretly, diligently searching for a trace of Kane.

He could not go far—a beggar—Hope realized, and after setting his new projects at work he calmly reflected over the labor done, the final results, attaining from the closing up of all the strange plots he had woven to ruin his enemy and restore to his rights the duped Albert Tremaine and his beautiful daughter, Claire.

Ah! a new inspiration filled the man's soul as he comprehended that brisk, bright morning that he could go to Claire and inform her that accident—or rather subterfuge—had brought Kane to bay, and no longer need she continue her hateful part, nor her father remain in obscurity.

True, no tangible evidence sought for had been discovered by Claire that would surely incriminate Kane in the Everett Hope murder. But had he not "confessed!"

And Gideon Hope shuddered now as he recalled how sternly inflexible in his resolution he had bidden pure, innocent Claire Tremaine go even to the altar with the arch-schemer, but his secret must be wrested from him.

And now he could go to Claire, tell her how his plans had fructified more speedily than he had anticipated; how secret information she had obtained concerning the evil schemings of the Trust had enabled him to bring the soulless magnates to ruin; how Kane was a beggar and a fugitive! She could drop her mask, and Albert Tremaine could reappear and, going into court with the proofs of the swindlers' infamy Hope had secured, obtain justice, restitution, riches!

He could say to Claire, too—the man's heart roused, warmed, as he thought of her sunny face, of the new impetus love had given to life whenever the brooding tragedy of the past was temporarily obscured.

That morning Hope went to the house where Claire had been living since securing her position at the works.

He asked for her under the name she had gone by since assuming her new role.

The landlady greeted him, and looked and acted curious and puzzled, as she said:

"She is not here, sir—she has gone!"

"Gone!" repeated Hope, blankly.

"Yes, sir."

"When?"

"This morning—early."

"Where?"—a vague sensation of pain struck the speaker's heart.

"I do not know."

"Alone?"

"N—no, sir. Perhaps a note she left will explain."

"For me?"

"Yes, sir."

She went to her room, returned, handed her visitor a sealed envelope.

Gideon Hope tore it open—an icy hand seemed to clutch his heart as he read a chronicle of unflinching fealty, of awful sacrifice, of broken-hearted despair.

For Claire was indeed gone, lost, and Percy Kane had triumphed.

This was what the brief note read:

"You bade me wed him, if he asked, because vengeance, justice, demanded. He was gone inside a moment or two. He came out with a japanned tin box, placed it on a table, threw back its cover.

CHAPTER XV.

Gideon Hope stood dazed, crushed; a hideous blight seemed to have suddenly struck down courage, manhood, resolve—the sacrifice had been consummated. He had driven into the arms, the coils, of his most bitter enemy the one being on earth he worshipped next to the memory of his sainted brother.

Could aught atone!

A recognition of the daring, utter triumph of Percy Kane, aided and abetted by his own unconscious co-operation, appalled the man! At that moment, standing blinded and heart-sick at the threshold of fair Claire Denslow's recent home, in pitiful subjugation to fate, to doom, he realized how puny, how shadow-like, were the vanished powers of will and passion when pitted against the relentless, unyielding force of circumstance.

And now, revenge, hatred, the fierce joy of running down a foe, the glory of annihilating a political party and obliterating a giant trust—all, all, faded into nothingness, as mere filmy wreaths of smoke. These that had seemed so much were nothing in the face of a stern new presentment—Claire! Claire!

He had counted his enemy done for, a fugitive at his sole will, a candidate for the gallows when he elected. He had torn from Kane's grasp the fortune he had sought to carry away in flight to obscurity, and had gone home and slept, smiling, fiercely confident of holding his victim in the palm of his hand.

But Gideon Hope, shrewd, keen reader of mind and master of men that he was, had not weighed aright the boundless resources, the daring character of Percy Kane. In the apparent death throes of a supreme crucial struggle, the embroiled and assassin had dealt a blow, quick and deep, that humbled, dalted, crushed the victor of an hour.

If it were a subtle, ferocious stroke of revenge, the very iron of its cankering essence deprived Hope of momentary thought and action. If it was merely the blundering afterthought of the miscreant—ah! had he not won what was more worthy than fortune, or fame, or radiant, peerless being, who typified to Hope all that was beautiful on earth in life!

Hope staggered from the doorway in

which, puzzled and alarmed, stood the wonder-faced landlady.

"What shall I say to him?" he gasped; "to Denslow; Claire's father!"

A sickening sense of responsibility swayed him. When he had undertaken the scheme that was to bring Kane and his thieving colleagues to ruin, he had promised Denslow restitution. He could offer it now. In such a shape were the affairs of the metal combination, in possession of such irrefragable evidence concerning its underhand primary dealings with Hope, that in the inevitable reorganization of the wreck Denslow's just and pretentious claim could not be set aside—but what of that other element, far more dear to the fond parent's heart—Claire?

For while Denslow, in retirement at a distance, had consented that his daughter should assist Hope in his schemes, he had no idea how completely Claire had meant her promise to obey this strange secret friend, how far he, the master mind, would require her to proceed in order to get the tools fast and effectual about the wily wrecker.

When the new and unexpected visits had opened that brought Kane within Hope's power, as man to man, the self-confessed murderer of Everett Hope, the crisis was past—and, thrilled with strange new ardor, the possibilities of love and its rewards appealed to his soul, and Gideon Hope had hastened to apprise Claire of a victory only to face a defeat, an unexpected revelation that seemed to sweep the very ground from beneath his feet.

He might find Claire—ah! yes, as he had known he could drag from hiding his arch enemy when he wanted him—but how? A wife!—the bride of the blackest scoundrel the wide earth knew; and he, the almoner of this mad, wicked rite, that gave innocence and shuddering, shrinking horror into the keeping of villainy!

The thought maddened him—a blood-red mist obscured clear vision! Yet, too late! too late! He had willed the sacrifice, and as a lamb to the slaughter poor Claire had gone, a very victim to blind devotion and love.

It seemed as if infinite pity banished all other emotions now—in his sheer helplessness this strong man winced; he even trembled.

Blindly, vaguely, he went from the spot, seeing nothing, caring for nothing, his dull mind directing this course till, the shock of the hour losing its first devastating effect, the slow return of coherent thought might gradually fit him to realize what there was next to be done.

When he had come to the boarding house, high, elated spirits had hidden defiance to suspicion or fear, and Hope had not noted that he was followed at a guarded distance by a hulking giant of a fellow, who, in turn, was kept in sight by a wiry, ferret-faced creature evidently of his own ilk.

Now, as he left Claire's recent place of abode, this double cynosure still less attracted his attention. Hope was sheerly incapable of regarding, of analyzing extraneous environment.

As he threaded a lane lined with stunted cedars, the two men came closer together, and then decreased the distance as to the unsteady figure in advance of them.

When they had come to the most unfrequented and isolated portion of the winding road, the big fellow halted his companion abruptly.

"Cut in among the trees," he ordered, in a hoarse whisper.

"Right, boss!"

"Get abreast or ahead of him."

"And then?"

"Take your cue from me. If I can't manage him alone—"

"You can't; he's built for fight."

"He don't look it just now," muttered the other.

"Kane warned you: Two do the job, and make no miss!"

"There will be none!" wickedly grinned the big fellow.

He showed a lead-ended billy in the grasp of one hand. This leveled from the supporting wrist strap, he stole noiselessly toward Hope, as his companion darted in among the trees.

As a shadow swift and fitting was thrown across Gideon's path, the natural instinct of caution, of alert observation, roused in him.

He half turned, staring vaguely—a whistling sound cut the air.

Then—chug!

He experienced a stinging contact over the left eyebrow. The blow stirred him. He recognized that he was attacked, and murderously.

"You coward!"

"Easy—take it again!"

The fellow was a giant in build; stolidly confident in his superior weight and ox-like ponderosity, he threw himself forward precipitately for a finishing blow.

How it came about he could not precisely analyze, it was done so quickly, but in a flash Hope's arms were about his own, imprisoning him at the elbows and rendering the dangling slingshot ineffective.

(To be continued.)

Information.

"My wife told me to go to Bergen's to-day and buy a taboret," said Mary-ryat.

"For goodness' sake!" exclaimed Dumley, "what does she want with a thing like that?"

"Why, what is a taboret, anyway?"

"Don't you know? That's what an end man at the minstrel show uses."—Philadelphia Press.

Usually the Way.

As a pleasant-faced woman passed the corner Harris touched his hat to her and remarked to his companion:

"Ah, my boy, I owe a great deal to that woman."

"Your mother?" was the query.

"No; my landlady."—Detroit News-Tribune.

Well Said.

"If I were you," said the old bachelor to the benedict, "I'd either rule or know why."

"Well," was the reply, "as I already know why, I suppose that's half the battle!"—Atlanta Constitution.

Probably with a Cold Chisel.

"Does your husband give you all the money you need?"

"I can't say he gives it to me, but I manage to separate him from it."—Houston Post.

A SONG OF THANKSGIVING.

I'm thankful that the years are long—
However long they be—
They still are laborers glad and strong
That ever work for me.
This rose I cut with careless shears
And wear and cast away—
The cosmos wrought a million years
To make it mine a day.
This lily by the pasture bars
Beneath the walnut tree,
Long ere the fire-mist formed in stars,
Was on its way to me.

The laws of property are lax—
My neighbor's farm is fine;
I'm thankful, though he pays the tax,
The best of it is mine.
No sheriff's clutch can loose my grip
On fields I have not sown
Or shake my sense of ownership
In things I do not own.
I'm thankful for my neighbor's wood,
His orchard, lake, and sea;
For, while my eyes continue good,
I own all I can see.

I'm thankful for this mighty age,
These days beyond compare,
When hope is such a heritage
And life a large affair.
We thank the gods for low and high,
Right, wrong (as well we may),
For all the wrong of days gone by
Works goodness for to-day.
Here on Time's table-land we pause
To thank on bended knee,
To thank the gods for all that was,
And is, and is to be.

I'm thankful for the glow and grace
And winsome beauty of the Near,
The greatness of the Commonplace,
The glory of the Here.
I'm thankful for man's high emprise,
His stalwart sturdiness of soul,
The long look of his skyward eyes
That slights a far-off goal.
And so I feel to thank and bless
Both things unknown and understood—
And thank the stubborn thankfulness
That maketh all things good.
—Sam Walter Foss, in Success Magazine.

Mrs. Pettigill's Thanksgiving Dinner.

"The times is bad," sighed Mrs. Pettigill, looking as lugubrious as it was possible for a rosy-cheeked dumpling of a woman to look.

"That's so," assented her friend, Mary Ann Dawson.

"Pa says 'single misfortunes never come alone,'" continued Mrs. Pettigill. "Just for the matter of fact, I told him 'twan't to put it in the bank. Then old Brindle up an' died, so we have to buy out milk. An' now Sam Higgin's young ones hev all come down with the measles, an' Sam's out of a job; so, of course, pa can't collect rent from him."

"Seems to me Deacon Pettigill don't worry much 'bout his hard luck," suggested Miss Dawson.

"La, no! He says the Lord will provide; but I tell him the Lord expects folks to look out for themselves a little." And the good woman worked away with redoubled energy on the bedspread that she and her friend were engaged in quilting.

The quilting frame was set up in the "front room," and its mistress felt a pardonable pride in the red and green treppery carpet on the floor, and the somber half-cloth furniture ranged against the walls in uncompromising stiffness.

"I declare, Mrs. Pettigill," said the spinster, after a while, "you look all beat out. I'm 'fraid you're workin' too stiddy. It's kinder hard on you doin' this extra work just at Thanksgiving time."

"If you'll believe it, I ain't done nothin' for Thanksgiving!"

"What! ain't done no cookin'?" gasped Miss Dawson, to whose New England soul this breach of a time-honored observance was little less than sacrilege.

"Not a mite," replied Mrs. Pettigill. "I wasn't reckonin' on doin' much, times bein' so hard; then Joel took a notion that Lizzy Jane must go to his folks for Thanksgiving week, so I jest made up my mind not to worry over the cookin'. I had calculated on roastin' a turkey or a couple of chickens, but when I asked pa which he'd ruther hev, he says, 'Jest let's hev some nice codfish, with boiled beets and fried pork sauce, such as we uster hev years ago.'"

"For the land's sake! Why, I never heard of such a thing—that is, for Thanksgiving," stammered Miss Dawson.

"Nor nobody else, I guess," said Mrs. Pettigill, bubbling with laughter. "But, you see, Lizzy Jane just 'bominates codfish, so we ain't had none I don't know when; and her pa's awful fond of it."

"Dear, dear!" thought Miss Dawson, in silent horror. "I guess I orter go. Poor soul!" she said to herself, as she walked homeward; "she carries it off well, but they must be dreiful poor."

"I wonder what makes Mary Ann Dawson act so queer," soliloquized Mrs. Pettigill. "I s'pose it must be because she's an out-an'-out old maid."

"Wall, mother," said Deacon Pettigill

THE ANNUAL TRAGEDY!



on Thanksgiving morning. "I hope you ain't goin' back on that codfish dinner?"

"Dear, no, pa; but it is an awful queer dinner. I've half a mind to make an Indian pudding to keep the codfish company."

"Just the thing," declared the deacon, with a satisfied air.

At that moment there came a rousing knock at the door. It was little Tommy Tompkins, who lived close by. He had brought a two-quart pail of cranberries.

"Uncle John sent me a bushel of cranberries," he said bashfully; "an' ma 'lowed you might like to taste of 'em, 'cause they're Cape Cod cranberries."

"That was real kind of yer ma," said Mrs. Pettigill, as she emptied the pail and filled it again with rosy-checked apples. "There! Mebbe yer ma wouldn't mind hev'ing a few of our None-suches; an' I'll fill yer pockets with butternuts," she added.

Before the good woman could prepare her codfish and vegetables for cooking, she saw Farmer Gibson's old white horse and yellow market wagon stopping in front of the door.

"Wall, I'm in somethin' of a hurry," said the farmer, a little awkwardly, taking a big parcel from his wagon as he spoke. "I was on my way home from Westbury market, an' I jest thought mebbe you could use this turkey I had left over."

"Why, I dunno but what I'll take it off yer hands," said Mrs. Pettigill.

"I ain't askin' yer ter buy it, Mrs. Pettigill," said the bluff farmer, with increasing confusion. "I wanter give it ter yer. I couldn't sell it nobow," he added, "an' it would jest spile."

"It certainly is good of yer," said Mrs. Pettigill. "But you must let me give you a keg of our new cider; it's jest right for drinkin'."

Scarcely was the dinner well under way when there was another knock, and Lella Graham, the minister's little daughter, made her appearance with a basket on her arm.

"Oh, Mrs. Pettigill," she cried, eagerly, "granma sent us some of her very own mince pies for Thanksgiving, and mamma wants to know if you wouldn't accept two of them with her love?"

"Wall, I never!" ejaculated Mrs. Pettigill. "I was uncommon kind in your mother. I'll just fill yer basket with apples and butternuts."

Five minutes later pretty Tilla Graham, who lived next door to Miss Dawson, presented herself with a heaping dish of hot doughnuts.

"Mother was tryin' a new recipe," the young girl said, "an' she thought you wouldn't mind her sendin' you a few, as you was so busy."

"I swum! that looks somethin' like," said the deacon as he came home from church.

His wife prudently refrained from mentioning the various donations. She congratulated herself that as it was now past noon they would probably be allowed to dine in peace. Vain delusion! Scarcely were they seated at the table when Miss Dawson appeared, bearing a delicious looking chicken pie.

"You see," she said, breathlessly, "I

knew you hadn't no time for chicken fixin's, so I jest baked this pie when I hed the oven hot up."

"I'm sure you was just as thoughtful as you could be, Miss Dawson," returned Mrs. Pettigill. "An' I'll accept the pie of you'll stop an' help us eat it."

After some urging the spinster consented, and out of compliment to her the chicken pie was cut. But as she glanced at the platter of flaky codfish, cooked to just the right degree of tenderness, flanked by dishes of crimson beets, meaty potatoes and feathery biscuit, she confessed, "I do believe I'd ruther hev some of that than the pie." And when she had finished her repast with a dish of Mrs. Pettigill's golden-brown Indian pudding she declared, "I dunno when I've relished a meal so much."

"Jest come here a minnit," said Mrs. Pettigill, conducting her guest to the pantry, after the deacon had gone out.

"Now, whatever do you s'pose is the meaning of that?" and she pointed to the array of eatables with a look of perplexity on her rosy face.

"For the land's sake!" cried the spinster, blushing guiltily.

Mrs. Pettigill surveyed her visitor wonderingly.

"Why, you don't mean to say—" she began, and then she burst into a laugh.

"Mary Ann Dawson, I most think you're a goose," she said, when she had recovered her breath. "Do I look 's though I didn't hev 'nough ter eat?"

"I never said any such a thing," stammered Miss Dawson. "I jest happened to mention to the minister's wife an' Miss Graham 'bout your bein' so busy; an' you know you was talkin' considerable 'bout the hard times an'—an'—the codfish," faltered Miss Dawson. "But I never thought—"

"La! you needn't take it to heart," interrupted Mrs. Pettigill. "But I dain't tell pa. Howsumever, I guess I give 'em as good as they sent. There's one thing I can't make out, though, an' that is 'bout Farmer Gibson. He lives a good two miles from here, so he couldn't very well hear anything."

"Maybe I can explain that," said Miss Dawson, with a conscious blush. "You see, Mr. Gibson and me's calculatin' to get married 'bout Christmas time."

"Well, ef that don't beat all!" ejaculated Mrs. Pettigill. "I guess he'll be a real good provider. An' I'm sure I hope you'll be happy. Now, s'pose he might be comin' over to your house to-night?"

"I s'pose he might," returned Miss Dawson.

"Well, ef you'll jest get him to call an' take these donations over to Sam Higgin's we won't say another word 'bout 'em. Well, I do declare," soliloquized Mrs. Pettigill, after her friend had gone. "Ef that don't beat all. And him a confirmed old bachelor, and here an out-an'-out old maid."—People's Home Journal.

A Severe Test.

The editor insisted. The aged humorist, who all his life had been penning gay and frivolous